

PROSPECT; or, *View of the Moral World.*

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Comments upon the Sacred Writings of the Jews and Christians. Exodus Chapter 14.

IF the writers of the Old Testament had been determined to destroy the moral excellence of God's character, they could not have chosen a better plan of accomplishing this object than that which is presented in the book of Exodus. In this chapter the climax of villainy is completed; God is represented as still going on with rancorous zeal and cruel work of hardening Pharaoh's heart, till he brings him at last to dreadful destruction. The chosen band at last make their escape; Pharaoh is inspired with a disposition of heart to pursue them, and he and all his host are said to have been drowned in the red sea. How came he to pursue them? The answer is found in the 4th verse, and is as follows, "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honored upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord." Here God is represented as making Pharaoh do a certain thing, and then killing him for doing it. But he had a reason for this, which is that the Egyptians might know that he was the Lord. How terribly jealous of his name this Jewish divinity was! And always distressed for fear the people would not know that he was the Lord. I am the Lord, and ye shall know that I am the Lord, was the burden of his song! Does the real God of nature, the Creator of the world, stand in need of such pitiful resorts to make himself known, and preserve the dignity of his character? These are the rancorous ebullitions of man, and not the solemn asseverations of God. In the 8th verse there is a repetition of this same hardening scheme as if the writer was not satisfied with one wicked description of the deity whom he adored. In addition to this circumstance of so often infusing an obdurate temperament into the heart of Pharaoh, we are next presented with a

most wonderful and splendid violation of the laws of nature! This is predicted by Moses and he commands his slavish banditti to stand still and see the salvation of God. Here the Jewish conjurer comes forward again and with his rod of enchantment is represented as having power to divide the red sea and cause the chosen people to pass through upon dry land. (See verses 16 and 17). In this last verse God has extended the sphere of his influence and comprehended within the decree of obduracy the Egyptians themselves, as well as their royal tyrant. Three times in this chapter he is charged with the same crime, that of hardening the hearts of the creatures whom he had made for purposes of moral sympathy and benevolence. This miracle however of dividing the waters of the red sea is said to have been performed in a curious kind of manner; in one place Moses is the ostensible agent by stretching out his rod, and in another God produces the effect by a strong east wind. Some travellers and naturalists have asserted, that there is a place in the red sea, a large sand-bar where at a certain time of tide, and with the wind in a particular direction it is possible to pass with little or no depth of water. This is probably but an idle story without foundation; for in the first place it is intrinsically improbable, and in the second place if it had been a fact the Egyptians must have known as much of it as the Israelites, and therefore could not have been circumvented in the manner herein stated. The whole account, however, is marked with fiction and extravagance; it is a departure from the regular operation of nature's laws; it subjects the divine character to unjust imputations, and is therefore destitute of all the features of truth and consistency.

RELIGIOUS FEAR.

The Bible says, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and Boulanger, a writer in defence of the re-

ligion of nature, says, it is the beginning of folly. Here then are the bible writers, versus Boulanger, and Boulanger, versus the bible writers. Those who are strongly attached to revelation, will consider it a profane business to set up an individual against a host of inspired penmen by which the world is supposed to have been enlightened. Numbers however have nothing to do with truth, and if all the learned clergy in the world were to affirm that one was equal to three, and that three were no more than one, there could not be found on the face of the earth a sure and correct mind that would give credit to the affirmation. If all the believers on earth should also contend in favour of religious fear it would demonstrate nothing relative to its real utility. This subject is an important one, and at some future time we intend to bestow upon it further and more serious reflections. At present, however, it will be of use to throw out some leading ideas. The great instrument constantly employed by ecclesiastical despotism, for the subjugation of the world has been fear. This despotism has made man afraid of himself; it has made him afraid of his fellow creatures; it has made him afraid of the devil, and afraid of God. Here then are four distinct objects to which the weakness of man has yielded in the indulgence of fearful apprehensions. The first species of fear relates to himself; man is afraid of his own powers, afraid to exercise his own faculties—he is terrified and alarmed when reflections arise in his mind hostile to the orthodox systems of antiquity. He is also dreadfully alarmed if any of his neighbours call in question any of his opinions. This implies that man has neither the right of thinking nor speaking; what a miserable reflection! when will man learn to exercise intellectual courage? He is afraid of the devil. The only devil that men have to fear is their own vicious actions, and these they have it abundantly in their power to correct. He is afraid of God! What stupid mind was it that first invented the idea that human beings ought to tremble before the Supreme and benevolent Creator of the universe. There is but one thing that man ought to fear, and that is vice.

To MR. MOORE, of New-York,
Commonly called

B I S H O P M O O R E.

I have read in the newspapers your account of the visit you made to the unfortunate General Hamilton, and of administering to him a ceremony of your church which you call the *Holy Communion*.

I regret the fate of General Hamilton, and I so far hope with you that it will be a warning to thoughtless man not to sport away the life that God has given him; but with respect to other parts of your letter I think it very reprehensible and betrays great ignorance of what true religion is. But you are a priest, you get your living by it, and it is not your worldly interest to undeceive yourself.

After giving an account of your administering to the deceased what you call the *Holy Communion*, you add, "By reflecting on this melancholy event let the humble believer be encouraged ever to hold fast that precious faith which is the *only source of true consolation* in the last extremity of nature. Let the infidel be persuaded to abandon his opposition to the Gospel."

To shew you, sir, that your promise of consolation from scripture has no foundation to stand upon, I will cite to you one of the greatest falsehoods upon record, and which was given, as the record says, for the purpose, and as a promise, of consolation.

In the epistle called "the First Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians," (chap. 4.) The writer consoles the Thessalonians as to the case of their friends who were already dead. He does this by informing them, and he does it he says; by the word of the Lord, (a most notorious falsehood) that the general resurrection of the dead, and the ascension of the living, will be in his and their days; that their friends will then come to life again; that the dead in Christ will rise first.—"Then WE (says he v. 17) which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with THEM in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord—Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Delusion and falshood cannot be carried higher than they are in this passage. You, sir, are but a novice in the art. The words admit of no equivocation. The whole passage is in the *first person* and the *present tense*, "*We which are alive.*" Had the writer meant a future time, and a distant generation, it must have been in the third person and the future tense, "*They who shall then be alive.*" I am thus particular for the purpose of nailing you down to the text, that you may not ramble from it, nor put other constructions upon the words than they will bear, which priests are very apt to do.

Now, sir, it is impossible for serious man, to whom God has given the divine gift of reason, and who employs that reason to reverence and adore the God that gave it, it is, I say, impossible for such a person to put confidence in a book that abounds with fable and falshood as the New Testament does. This passage is but a sample of what I could give you.

You call on those whom you stile "*infidels,*" (and they in return might call you an idolater, a worshiper of false Gods, a preacher of false doctrine) "to abandon their opposition to the Gospel." Prove, sir, the Gospel to be true and the opposition will cease of itself; but until you do this, (which we know you cannot do) you have no right to expect they will notice your call. If by *infidels* you mean *Deists*, (and you must be exceedingly ignorant of the origin of the word *Deist*, and know but little of *Deus*, to put that construction upon it) you will find yourself over-matched if you begin or engage in a controversy with them. Priests may dispute with priests, and sectaries with sectaries, about the meaning of what they *agree* to call scripture and end as they began; but when you engage with a Deist you must keep to fact. Now, Sir, you cannot prove a single article of your religion to be true and we tell you so publicly. Do it, if you can. The Deistical article, *the belief of a God*, with which your creed begins, has been borrowed by your church from the ancient Deists, and even this article you

dishonour by putting a *dream-begotten* Phantom* which you call his son over his head, and treating God as if he was superannuated. Deism is the only profession of religion that admits of worshipping and reverencing God in purity, and the only one on which the thoughtful mind can repose with undisturbed tranquility. God is almost forgotten in the Christian religion. Every thing, even the creation, is ascribed to the son of Mary.

In religion, as in every thing else, perfection consists in simplicity. The Christian religion of Gods within Gods, like wheels within wheels, is like a complicated machine that never goes right, and every projector in the art of Christianity is trying to mend it. It is its defects that have caused such a number and variety of tinkers to be hammering at it, and still it goes wrong. In the visible world no time-keeper can go equally true with the sun; and in like manner, no complicated religion can be equally true with the pure and unmixed religion of Deism.

Had you not offensively glanced at a description of men whom you call by a false name, you would not have been troubled nor honoured with this address; neither has the writer of it any desire or intention to enter into controversy with you. He thinks the temporal establishment of your church politically unjust and offensively unfair; but with respect to religion itself, distinct from temporal establishments, he is happy in the enjoyment of his own, and he leaves you to make the best you can of yours.

A MEMBER OF THE DEISTICAL CHURCH.

* The first chapter of Matthew, relates that Joseph, the betrothed husband of Mary, dreamed that an angel told him that his intended bride was with child by the Holy Ghost. It is not every husband, whether carpenter or priest, that can be so easily satisfied, for lo! it was a dream. Whether Mary was in a dream when this was done we are not told. It is, however, a comical story. There is no woman living can understand it. As for priests it is quite out of their way.

Profession of Faith from Rousseau, continued.

As if all the natural inclinations of man were annihilated by the depravation of one people, and as if when monsters appeared the species itself were extinct. But what end did it serve to the sceptical Montaigne, to take so much trouble to discover, in an obscure corner of the world, a custom opposed to the common notions of justice? What end did it answer for him to place a confidence in the most suspicious travellers, which he refused to the most celebrated writers? Should a few whimsical and uncertain customs, founded on local motives unknown to us, invalidate a general induction, drawn from the united concurrence of all nations, contradicting each other in every other point, and agreeing only in this? You pique yourself, Montaigne, on being ingenuous and sincere; give us a proof of your frankness and veracity: tell me if there be any country upon earth, in which it is deemed a crime to be sincere, compassionate, beneficent and generous; in which an honest man is despicable, and knavery held in esteem?

It is pretended that every one contributes to the public good for his own interest; but whence comes it that the virtuous man contributes to it, to his prejudice? Can a man lay down his life for his own interest? It is certain all our actions are influenced by a view to our own good; but unless we take moral good into the account, none but the actions of the wicked can be ever explained by motives of private interest. We imagine, indeed, no more will be attempted; as that would be too abominable a kind of philosophy, by which we should be puzzled to account for virtuous actions; or could extricate ourselves out of the difficulty only by attributing them to base designs, and sinister views, by debasing a Socrates and calumniating a Regulus. If ever such doctrines should take rise among us, the voice of nature as well as of reason would check their growth, and leave not even one of those who inculcate them the simple excuse of being sincere.

It is not my design here to enter into such metaphysi-

cal investigations, as surpass both your capacity and mine, and which in fact are useless. I have already told you I would not talk philosophy to you, but only assist you to consult your own heart.

To this end you need only to distinguish between our acquired ideas, and our natural sentiments, for we are sensible before we are intelligent; and, as we do not learn to desire our own good and to avoid what is evil, but possess this desire immediately from nature, so the love of virtue and hatred of vice, are as natural as the love of ourselves. The operations of conscience are not intellectual, but sentimental; for though all our ideas are acquired from without, the sentiments which estimate them arise from within; and it is by these alone, that we know the agreement or disagreement which exists between us and those things which we ought to seek or shun.

To exist is, with us, to be sensible; our sensibility is incontestably prior to our intelligence, and we were possessed of sentiments before we formed ideas. Whatever was the cause of our being, it hath provided for our preservation in furnishing us with sentiments agreeable to our constitution, nor can it possibly be denied that these at least are innate. These sentiments are in the individual, the love of himself, aversion to pain, dread of death, and the desire of happiness. But if, as it cannot be doubted, man is by nature a social being, or at least formed to become such, his sociability absolutely requires that he should be furnished with other innate sentiments relative to his species: for to consider only the physical wants of men, it would certainly be better for them to be dispersed than assembled.

To be continued.

* * * Discourses concerning the principles and effects of the Christian Religion, will be delivered every Sunday evening at the Assembly-Room, No. 68, William-street.

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